

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Education requires a peaceful environment to achieve its purposes and objectives but conflict destabilizes higher institutions and university systems in particular. This study sought to determine the management strategies to be adopted for conflict resolution in federal and state universities in south east Nigeria. Two research questions and four null hypotheses were formulated and tested with ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire developed and validated by three experts in the department of educational administration and planning and measurement and evaluation, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cronbach alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the items in the instrument and it gave an overall result of 0.83 for the two clusters. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the two research questions while ANOVA was used to test the two null hypotheses. The results revealed that management strategies for conflict resolution adopted include measures such as constant supply of electricity; reduction in tuition fees; building and equipping hostels to accommodate more students for effective learning and research, organizing workshops and seminars on the dangers of conflict and on peace education, among others. Based on the findings, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

KEYWORDS: Management, Management Strategies, Conflict, Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution

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INTRODUCTION

Education is important in the development of man such that he becomes useful to himself, society and humanity at large. Education requires a peaceful environment to achieve its purpose and to fulfill its objectives, but the rate at which conflict occur in the tertiary institutions, including federal and state universities in the south east Nigeria makes it difficult for education to achieve its objectives.

Conflict destabilizes organizations, higher education, particularly university systems. Conflict in simple term means a state of disagreement, controversy or opposition. It could also mean the existence of a prolonged battle, struggle or clash between two or more parties. According to Nicholas (1992) conflict is a situation where two people or group wish to carry out acts which are mutually incompatible.

Conflict according to Wehmeier (2005) is a situation in which people, group or countries are involved in serious disagreement. It is also a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes, a situation in which it is difficult to decide either way because it is not possible for both parties to be treated equally and fairly at the same time. Otite (2007) defined conflict as a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain a desired value and position but to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. According to Travel (2009) conflict is an overt struggle between individuals or groups, when tension or stress is involved, and develops when the satisfaction of specific needs is

thwarted by equally attractive or unattractive desires. Otite (2007) added that conflict is a situation where the disputants are hostile to each other in order to achieve a set goal. In the process of the struggles, the organizations may be destabilized and these struggles are regulated by a hierarchy of human needs, selfishness, possessiveness, greed, as well as sociological, political, cultural, psychological, religious motives, students' genuine and selfish demands. Conflict therefore, is an act of disarray, a situation where there is disorganization, discord, instability, open quarrel and no peace for the individuals involved.

According to Lulofs (1994) conflict is characterized as being destructive. Lives and properties are lost during violent conflict. When conflict is violent, it becomes extremely difficult to handle. Most times conflict is very destructive but non-violent conflict is easier to manage. The federal and state universities in the south-east have had and are still having series of conflicts and protests by the students and frequent disruption of the academic calendar, which has become part and parcel of the university academic system. That is why Ugwumba (1999) stated, that the onetime pride of the university is now marred by situations that produce CONFLICTS such as secret cults, rape, frequent strikes, personality clashes, struggles for supremacy and all other associated vices such as examination malpractices and theft.

The universities have been turned into battle fields, academic and non-academic staff go on strike over claims and rights due them while students struggle and destroy school properties because their needs are not met. Some vice chancellors in the federal and state universities have been forced out of office and some beaten, wounded, kidnapped and their lodges broken into by the students. For example, in 2008/2009 session, students of one of the universities in south-east Nigeria made a violent protest over rumoured plan to increase fees. During the protest, many university properties were damaged. The vice chancellor's lodge was targeted and extensively damaged while the vice-chancellor himself escaped.

It is a truism that university environment should be a place where people should be tolerant and aware of their differences and willing to live and work together. One of the most fundamental problems currently posing a threat is the issue of conflict management in the federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria. In Nigeria, universities, experience conflicts of all kinds and also between different groups within its jurisdiction. It will therefore be expected that conflict could occur between academic and non-academic staff, management and non-academic staff, management and students, students versus students (Travel.2009).

This study is particularly concerned with conflict between management and students. The conflict between management and students is common in the universities because it is more threatening and destructive to live and property. Obanya (2002) reported that university management are increasingly worried about the change that occur in the university system in the area of students' conflicts. These make it difficult for universities to achieve their target.

Conflict if not properly managed can lead to many hazards in the educational system including non-realization of educational goals. Therefore, good management of the institutions are necessary, to help reduce the alarming rate of conflict among staff, academic, non-academic and specifically between management and the students. In the universities, the vice-chancellor, deputy vice-chancellor (academic), deputy vice-chancellor (administration), the deans and heads of departments are all academic staff. In addition to the academic staff, registrar, the faculty officers and senior administrative officers are also involved in the universities policy making. These two groups, in addition to the Heads of the non-academic support units such as works and student affairs constitute the university management.

This study will have as its respondents the listed groups of staff who are in administration. In the context of this study, conflicts emanating from different universities in the south-east Nigeria are mandatorily managed by the administrators whose duty it is to do so and help prevent future occurrence.

Management according to Nwachukwu (2009) is the coordination of all the resources of an organization through the process of planning, organizing, directing and controlling in order to attain organizational objectives. It is the guidance or direction of people towards organizational goals or objectives. It is the supervising, controlling and co-ordinating of activity to attain optimum results with organizational resources. As an authority in educational management, Peretomode (1991) defines management as the social or interactional process involving a sequence of co-ordinated events – planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling or leading in order to use available resources to achieve a desired outcome in the fastest and most efficient way. Management is defined by McShane (2009) as the art of getting things done through people in organizations. Mgbodile (2004) defined management as leadership, which is aimed at influencing group activity towards goal achievement. This definition implies that in order to ensure the achievement of the goals of an establishment there has to be effective management of both human and material resources.

Conflict management is aimed at quietening and calming an already existing conflict in an institution which one expects to occur because people and groups are involved. Travel (2009) defines conflict management as the process of planning to avoid conflict where possible and organizing to resolve conflict where it does happen rapidly and smoothly as possible. According to Kellet (2007), conflict management is the variety of ways by which managers handle grievances, that is, standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider wrong. Conflict management is the principle that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation. Conflict management involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict, conflict communication skill and establishing a structure for management of conflict in one's environment including university environment.

It is quite difficult to control or manage conflict where too many people are involved. This is a problem being faced by most institutions in Nigeria especially those of the federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria but the managers may not fold their hands and watch problems erode their environments because most managers in tertiary institutions may not have conflict management skills and may not be willing to learn.

The federal universities are those universities owned by the federal government. The state universities are owned by state governments. The states that constitute south -east zone are Enugu, Anambra, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi states. Conflicts between management and students have been on the increase and cultism has taken the lives of many students in federal and state universities in south east Nigeria. According to Wehmeier (2005) cult is a group of people who have extreme religious beliefs and who are not part of any established religion. The cults in universities tend to be secretive, doing their things without non-members knowing exactly what they do. They break into communal consciousness when the activities conflict with interest of society and when different cults war are against each other.

Conflicts have been occurring and reoccurring between students and management of universities in Nigeria in general and federal and state in particular. When they occur for a very long period of time, the current strategies for management of these conflicts have been based on use of force and coercion by which the universities are closed down and students sent home for prolonged period of time ranging from weeks and months. The hope in this strategy is that when the universities eventually reopened and students recalled, the intimidated students who are by now desperate to complete their

education and graduate accept just anything the authorities dictate without going through the process of negotiation. Usually, the students are made to sign under-taken to be of good behaviour and made to pay reparation for damaged properties.

The federal and state universities in the south-east may have different ways of handling conflicts and that depends on the condition of that very university. The conflict options may not work out the same way because what works in one university in the south-east may not be feasible in another university in the zone. Consequently, in the context of Nigerian universities, one key element of the ability of managers to control conflicts is to understand the peculiar characteristics of the university, which is under their control. It is against this background that the researcher seeks to investigate the management strategies for conflict resolution in the federal and state universities in south-east Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Conflict in institutions of higher learning including the federal and state universities in south-east Nigeria have reached an alarming rate. Such conflicts often threaten the lives and properties of both students and staff of the universities. In addition to destruction of lives and property, conflicts result in loss of study and learning times with research also suffering untold setbacks and disruption. Consequently, governments, parents and the general public become apprehensive whenever conflict erupts in our universities and respond with attempts and efforts to contain the conflict.

Conflict containment can only succeed if the causes are identified, isolated and dealt with. The causes could be direct and indirect. One of the most indirect causes of conflicts in the universities is overpopulation. Direct causes include high tuition fees, inadequate supply of water and electricity, inadequate lecture hall spaces. Non-involvement of students in decision making, periodic strikes and maintenance of students' sanitary conveniences

When these irritants are not addressed, students become irritated and in the resultant conflict, teaching, learning, learning and research are disrupted. The standard responses of the authorities to protests by students have been punitive, ranging from rustication of students, expulsion and closure of the institution for varying lengths of time. The cumulative effect is that contact time between students and teachers for effective learning becomes shortened and the universities produce half-baked and generally unemployable graduates. When employed, they are incompetent, ineffective and consequently unproductive. Such unemployed graduate could be lured into crime. The insecurity resultant from this, discourage investments in the economy and fuelling underdevelopment.

These strategies used by universities and governments in managing conflicts between students and university managements have been found inadequate and ineffective as they only succeed in using coercion to force students to become quiet, allowing the conflict to simmer underground only to erupt again at the least provocation. In this paper, management strategies for conflict resolution in federal and state universities in south-east Nigeria, is therefore aimed at determining the strategies and management practices currently used in these universities with the objective of assessing their adequacy and suggesting more enduring strategies.

Purpose of the Study

- Ascertain the management strategies employed by the management team of federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria.
- Determine the management strategies that could be adopted for conflict resolution in the federal and state

universities in the south-east Nigeria.

Research Questions

- What are the management strategies employed by the management team of federal and state universities in handling conflicts in the south-east Nigeria?
- What are the management strategies to be adopted for conflict resolution in the federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria?

Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant difference among the mean ratings of the academic, administrative staff, and students on the management strategies employed by the federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference among the mean ratings of the academic, administrative staff, and students on the management strategies to be adopted in conflict resolution in the federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study is a descriptive survey conducted in south-east geo-political zone of Nigeira. This design is considered most appropriate for the study because it allows the collection of original data from the respondents themselves, helps to homogenize the population by allowing all respondents equal chance of being selected.

The population consists all the staff and students of the federal and state universities in south-east Nigeria totaling two hundred and twenty-eight thousand, eight hundred and nine (228,809). These were made up of eight thousand four hundred and sixty-three (8,463) academic staff, sixteen thousand four hundred and eighty eight (16,488) non-academic staff and two hundred and three thousand, eight hundred and fifty-eight (203,858) students.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size of the study was 384. A multi-stage cluster random sample technique was used for the study. Six universities were sampled out of ten (10) universities. A faculty and a department in each of the six universities were randomly selected. Then a systematic sampling technique was used to select the respondents (students and staff) from the six selected universities. The sample size of 384 was got by putting the total population in a Raosoft sample size calculator to give the accurate sample size. In the Raosoft sample size calculator, the sample size, n , is given by the expression:

$$X = Z(C/100)2r(100-r)$$

$$N = NXC(N-1)E^2 + X$$

$$E = \sqrt{[(N-n)X/n(N-1)]}$$

Where N = Study population size

r = Fraction of responses of interest

C = Confidence level whose critical value is given by $Z(C/100)$

The Raosoft calculator is computer software with these formulae inbuilt such that one only to enter the values of:

- The margin of error tolerable (in this case 0.05 or 5%)
- Confidence level (in this case 95%)
- Study population size (in this case 228,809) and
- Fraction of responses of interest (in this case 50%)

The sample size at 5% level of accuracy was selected. Thus, the minimum sample size determined for the study is 384. This number was distributed among the universities in proportion to their various sizes in the total study population.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument for data generation was Structured Management Strategies Conflict Resolution (SMSCR) Questionnaire. The questionnaire has two clusters: A and B. Cluster A contains item 1 – 9 on the management strategies employed by the management while cluster B contains items 10 – 26 on the management strategies to be adopted for conflict management. The items were presented on a 4-point Likert type scale of Strongly Agree (A), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was subjected to face validation. The data generated for trial-testing of the instrument was used to compute the reliability of the instrument. The reliability co-efficient obtained using Cronbach Alpha were 0.84 for the management strategies employed and 0.85 for the management strategies adopted in resolving conflict. The instrument was administered by the researcher with the help of five trained assistants. These assistants helped in distributing the questionnaire and retrieving them.

The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the two research questions while the hypotheses were tested using analyses of variance (ANOVA) to find the difference among the mean ratings of academic, administrative staff and students on the management strategies employed and adopted by the universities in conflict resolutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Question 1

What are the management strategies employed by the management teams of Federal and State Universities in South-East Nigeria in handling conflicts?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Response to Management Strategies Employed by the Management Teams in Handling Conflict in the Universities

Items		State (163)		Federal (209)		Overall (372)		Remark
Code		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Item C1	Using force or coercion to control students e.g. deploying security men.	2.90	1.00	2.88	1.02	2.88	1.01	Agree
Item C2	Expelling students who are involved in conflict.	3.04	0.90	2.77	0.94	2.88	0.93	Agree
Item C3	Calling in police to disperse students with tear gas during protests.	2.64	1.02	2.60	1.06	2.62	1.03	Agree
Item C4	Arresting and detaining students by the police or security men.	2.79	0.93	2.60	0.99	2.68	0.97	Agree

Table 1: Contd.,								
Item C5	Suspension of students' union leaders for planning a demonstration.	2.73	0.99	2/78	1.07	2.76	1.02	Agree
Item C6	Banning of students' union activities	2.52	1.06	2.53	1.09	2.152	1.07	Agree
Item C7	Closure of institution because of the conflict	2.54	1.03	2.58	1.08	2.56	1.06	Agree
Item C8	Paying of reparation fees for damages.	2.83	0.93	2.78	1.02	2.80	0.98	Agree
Item C9	Signing of undertaking by parents for their children and wards.	3.02	0.96	2.99	0.94	3.00	0.94	Agree
Overall		2.77	0.67	2.73	0.72	2.75	0.70	Agree

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the response to the management strategies employed by the management team of federal and state universities in south-east Nigeria in handling conflicts. The result revealed that items 1 – 9, with mean ratings of 2.52 and 3.00, the respondents agree to the items as the management strategies employed by federal and state universities in handling conflicts. The overall mean is 2.75. This implies that the respondents agree that the cluster represents the management strategies employed by the management teams of federal and state universities in south-east Nigeria in handling conflicts.

Research Question 2

What are the management strategies to be adopted for conflicts resolution in Federal and State Universities in the South-East Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Response to Management Strategies to be Adopted for Conflicts Resolution in the Universities

Items	Items	State (163)		Federal (209)		Overall (372)		Remark
Code		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Item D10	Constant supply of electricity especially during the night to enable the students read.	3.56	0.78	3.44	0.82	3.49	0.81	Agree
Item D11	Reviewing of the amount of money paid as tuition fees by the students	3.44	0.75	3.40	0.83	3.42	0.79	Agree
Item D12	Building more hostels to meet up with accommodation problems	3.55	0.76	3.38	0.86	3.45	0.82	Agree
Item D13	Maintaining and cleaning of the toilet in universities	3.45	0.68	3.37	0.76	3.41	0.72	Agree
Item D14	Building and equipping standard library for the students	3.52	0.67	3.43	0.82	3.47	9.76	Agree
Item D15	Keeping the environment clean and tidy for the students	3.40	0.65	3.40	0.73	3.40	0.70	Agree
Item D16	Making students' part of the University management	3.23	0.84	3.34	0.85	3.29	0.85	Agree
Item D17	Maintaining regular welfare services such as medical treatment	3.45	0.67	3.48	0.71	3.47	0.69	Agree

Table 2: Contd.,								
Item D18	Having meetings and interactions with the students by faculty or departments	3.44	0.69	3.38	0.82	3.40	0.77	Agree
Item D19	Introducing peace and conflict studies as a general course in the universities.	3.47	0.73	3.29	0.76	3.37	0.75	Agree
Item D20	Organizing workshops and regular talks to students on peace and conflict resolution	3.43	0.67	3.38	0.68	3.40	0.67	Agree
Item D21	Reminding students constantly of the rules and regulations in the university	3.25	0.76	3.31	0.69	3.28	0.72	Agree
Item D22	Organizing seminars on usefulness of peace for the students.	3.47	0.65	3.34	0.74	3.40	0.71	Agree
Item D23	Avoiding calling in the police over any issue but negotiate with the students and their leaders	3.14	0.87	3.04	0.91	3.08	0.89	Agree
Item D24	Avoiding discussing some students' problems but to allow the problems die a natural death	2.33	1.05	2.49	1.13	2.42	1.09	Disagree
Item D25	Finding out the reasons for students' demonstrations and addressing the issues through dialogue.	3.40	0.75	3.49	0.72	3.45	0.73	Agree
Item D26	Reminding the students that the institution is supposed to be for training and not for conflict.	3.42	0.68	3.31	0.66	3.35	0.67	Agree
Item D27	School policy to be stressed and made very clear to the students.	3.38	0.71	3.33	0.67	3.35	0.69	Agree
Item D28	Paying due attention to students' needs.	3.46	0.75	3.48	0.74	3.47	0.74	Agree
Item D29	Eliciting co-operation and support from management and students	3.37	0.75	3.35	0.72	3.31	0.75	Agree
Item D30	Meeting regularly with management and student's body	3.33	0.73	3.31	0.77	3.31	0.75	Agree
Item D31	Keeping students busy with academic activities to reduce distractions.	3.21	0.85	3.25	0.71	3.23	0.77	Agree
Item D32	Enlightenment on the effects of conflict.	3.37	0.65	3.40	0.60	3.38	0.62	Agree
Item D33	Applying strategies that suit various conflict situations.	3.34	0.67	3.39	0.63	3.37	0.64	Agree
Item D34	Management should adopt preventive and proactive measures for conflicts resolution at the inception of their administration	3.50	0.65	33.50	0.66	3.45	0.65	Agree
+Overall		3.35	0.41	3.33	0.41	3.34	0.41	Agree

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the responses on the management strategies to be adopted for conflict resolution in the universities in south-east, Nigeria. The result revealed that item 24 with mean ratings of 2.33 and 2.42 the respondents disagree with the item as a management strategy to be adopted for conflict resolution in federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria. However, with an overall mean of 3.34, the respondents agree that all the items are management strategies to be adopted for conflict resolution.

Table 3: Summary of ANOVA of Difference among the Mean Ratings of Academic, Non-Academic and Students on Management Strategies Employed by Universities

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Between groups	2.323	2	1.162			
Within groups	179.030	368	.486	2.388	.093	NS
Total	181.353	370				

Table 3 shows the summary of ANOVA for difference among the mean ratings of academic, non-academic staff and students on management strategies employed by the federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria. The result revealed that the calculated value of F is 2.388 with the $P=0.093$. This F-value is not significant at 0.05, this is because 0.093 is greater than 0.05 that is ($P = 0.93$; $P > 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted hence, there is no significant difference among the mean ratings of academic staff, non-academic staff and students on management strategies employed by the federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria.

Table 4: Summary of ANOVA of Difference among the Mean Rating of Academic Staff, Non-Academic Staff and Students on Management Strategies Adopted for Conflicts Resolution in Universities

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Between groups	.046	2	.023			
Within groups	61.389	368	.167	.137	.872	NS
Total	61.435	370				

Table 4 shows the summary of the ANOVA for the difference among the mean rating of academic staff, non-academic staff and students on management strategies for conflicts resolution in the federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria. The result revealed that the calculated value of F is 0.137 with the $P = 0.872$. This F-value is not significant at 0.05 level, because 0.872 is greater than 0.05 that is ($P = 0.872$; $P > 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted hence, there is no significant difference among the mean ratings of academic staff, non-academic staff and students on management strategies to be adopted for conflicts resolution in the federal and state universities in the south-east Nigeria.

The academic staff, non-academic staff and students agree on all the items on the management strategies employed by the management teams in handling conflicts in federal and state universities in south-east Nigeria. The three groups of respondents also agree to the items of research question two on the management strategies to be adopted for conflict resolution in federal and state universities in south-east Nigeria.

The results revealed that items 1-9 are the management strategies employed by the management team of the universities. This implies that the academic staff, non-academic staff and students' agree with the management strategies applied in both federal and state universities in south-east in handling conflicts. These strategies include: using force or coercion to control students, expelling students who involved in conflict, calling in police to disperse students with tear

gas, suspension of students' union leaders for planning demonstration, closing down institutions, making students pay reparation fees for damages, arresting and detaining students' by the police or security men. This is in line with findings of Ghaffer (2010) who opined that the threat of violence has a deterrent effect tending stabilization and therefore, towards maintenance of peace.

The results on management strategies to be adopted revealed relatively high mean scores on almost all the item statements except item 24 which stated that students problems should be left to die a natural death. The results is in line Best (2009) who found that it is a way of not addressing the conflict or a tactful way of postponing the conflict for better time if at all such a time will come. This is in line with Neal (2003) who stated that, the issues on conflict should not be debated inconclusively and peoples' feeling should not be considered whether conflict will be resolved or abated.

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of this study, it could be concluded that adopting effective conflict management strategies are very vital for institutional growth and active participation of administrators, teachers and students. This could be because conflict management strategies have significance impact on the growth of any institutions especially higher institutions.

Recommendations

On the basis of findings, the researchers made the following recommendations for improvement

- The university management should create time for regular discussions with students on issues that concern them as well as find out from students what they think about the university system and its governance.
- The management should provide information boxes for students to submit confidential reports and requests.
- The management should be open to dialogue for peace to reign. They should make use of conflict resolution options such as accommodation, collaboration and compromise.
- The university management should maintain harmonious relationship at all cost to enable students and staff work together as a team to achieve common goal.
- Finally, compromise option should be encouraged by management of universities as to ensure that peace exist among the various groups.

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